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THE DEFENSE OF SMALL TOWNS AND VILLAGES BY INFANTRY

- (1) THE DEFENSE OF BOOS, FRANCE, By a "Groupe Franc", 7-8 June 1940.
- (2) THE DEFENSE OF SCHMIDT, GERMANY, By the 3rd Battalion, 112th Infantry, 28th Division, 3-4 November 1944.
- Pg 40 (3) THE DEFENSE OF HOFEN, GERMANY, By the 3rd Battalion, 395th Infantry, 99th Division, 10 November-18 December 1944. *ret. monograph*
- (4) THE DEFENSE OF BUTZDORF AND TETTINGEN, GERMANY, By the 1st Battalion, 376th Infantry, 94th Division, 14-18 January 1945.

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THE DEFENSE OF SMALL TOWNS AND VILLAGES BY INFANTRY  
(A Tactical Study)

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this monograph is to study and analyze the principles, characteristics, and techniques of the defense of small towns and villages.

Throughout this discussion two underlying factors must be kept in mind. First, the defense of any built-up area, large or small, is organized and conducted in accordance with the doctrines and principles of defense as accepted by the United States Army. The defense of a town or village merely involves the intelligent consideration of factors peculiar to built-up areas in order to better apply the basic principles. (1) Secondly, any current, realistic military study must recognize and be guided by the fact that the Russian Army is not only the most powerful in the world, but that it might even be a potential foe. This study is admittedly influenced by speculations as to the effect Russian troops, with their very excellent tanks, and their tactics, which call for a closely coordinated tank-infantry team, might have on any American defensive position. (2)

NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF SMALL TOWNS AND VILLAGES

Small towns and villages are generally distinguished from cities and larger towns by the absence of multi-storied buildings, small built-up areas, and comparatively small populations. From a tactical standpoint it would not be correct to make an arbitrary classification of inhabited areas by the size of the population, since it is the size of the area and the types of buildings that influence the conduct of operations. Actually, it is impossible to make a hard and fast rule but, for the purpose of this study, any inhabited area that can be adequately defended by a unit no larger than a reinforced infantry battalion will be considered a small town

(1) A-2, p. 96; (2) Personal opinion.

or village. (3)

Inhabited areas possess physical characteristics that are predominantly in favor of the defense. Buildings and other structures provide concealment from ground and aerial observation, and protection from all types of enemy fires. Well defined avenues of approach, buildings and natural obstacles, canalize and restrict the movement of attacking forces, and at the same time disperse the enemy mass into small units that cannot be readily controlled. The defensive potentialities of towns and villages provide a haven for a weak force against the overpowering sweep of mechanized forces, and partially neutralize the attacker's superiority in men and equipment. (4)

The strength of a town or village as a defensive site may be gauged by an examination of the following characteristics:

1. Types of Structures:

Villages made up of buildings constructed principally of brick, concrete, or other forms of masonry are obviously best suited for the defense. The experience of the past two wars has been that heavy bombing and shelling has little effect on such positions, in fact the resulting rubble and debris tend to increase the cover and concealment afforded the defender. Two other important advantages of masonry structures are that they are relatively invulnerable to incendiaries, and are more apt to have cellars than other types of houses. (5) On the other hand, wooden houses are very vulnerable to incendiary action, they are more easily destroyed, and the rubble and debris of a frame structure does not make particularly good antitank obstacles. However, if time and materials are available, much can be done to fireproof and strengthen houses selected as defensive positions. (6)

2. Size and Shape:

The size and shape of a village must be considered to the

(3) Personal opinion; (4) A-2, p. 61; (5) A-2, p. 95; (6) A-16, p. 9.

extent that these may be undesirable characteristics. Extremely small villages or hamlets are poor defensive positions, for they provide no depth or dispersion, and are easily pinpointed by artillery fire. Sometimes villages will be laid out in a long straight line along a highway or stream and will be only two or three houses in depth. Here again is a position with no depth, but which provides a distinct feature for artillery fire to move along. (7)

### 3. Surrounding Terrain:

Whatever the values of the village proper, some consideration must be given to the terrain surrounding the village. Unless some discretion is exercised in the selection of towns to be held, they may be defeated in detail, becoming inclosures where the defending troops will be penned-up and destroyed at leisure. Villages should not be defended if they can be cut-off or by-passed; they must be so located that the enemy has no choice but to attack or abandon his drive. Topographical features that dominate the village must be secured, for an alert enemy will seize such ground in order to outflank the defenses or to make them untenable by fire. During the fighting in Italy, our troops found that the quickest and easiest method of capturing an enemy held town was to secure commanding ground to its flanks or rear. (8) From this, two rules can be deduced; towns and villages to be defended should be incorporated into a general defensive system and not left to fend for themselves. The second rule, a corollary to the first, is that a village must not be defended in an isolated position unless the terrain is such that it is impossible for the enemy to by-pass it. (9)

While it is true that villages and towns possess many characteristics sought in a defensive position, the chief reason for their defense is usually because of their tactical or strategical value. It is a

(7) Personal opinion; (8) A-13, p. 7; (9) A-13, p. 13.



characteristic of many small towns that they often occupy such critical terrain features as commanding ground, important road and rail junctions, bridging sites, mountain passes, or they are astride vital routes of communication, or may bar the way to large cities or other major objectives. The occupation and defense of such positions will halt or delay the enemy and force him into bloody time-consuming operations to clear the roads for his own use, for it has been well established that the modern army requires virtually unrestricted use of the roads to maintain the momentum of its attack. (10)

World War II clearly demonstrated the tactical significance of towns and villages in a variety of defensive situations. For example; the decision of the Red General Staff to defend every city, town, and village during the German drive through Russia in 1942 was even strategic in result. The bitter defense of every inhabited place made it impossible for the German columns to maintain headway; formations were delayed at every little hamlet; sorely needed men and equipment were lost in futile village fighting; and, most important of all, the Germans were denied the use of vital roads and communication centers which were required to provide logistical support for the attack. (11)

American troops have had relatively little experience in the defense of towns and villages, for during the past two wars they were engaged almost exclusively in offensive operations. Perhaps it is for this reason that apparently little thought has been given this subject. Field manuals discuss the defense of built up areas in only the most general terms, while detailed instructions are listed for the defense of natural terrain features.

As it is not likely that our armies will be on the offensive initially in the event of a third war, renewed emphasis and study might well be placed on the development of defensive techniques. It seems almost certain that (10) A-22; (11) A-24, p. 54.

the defense of small towns and villages will be much more important in future wars than it has in the past. It is not likely that extended defensive operations will be conducted within and about such large cities as Stalingrad or Chicago, but rather that defending armies will organize belts of defensive positions, to include small towns and villages as a protection against armor, principally to avoid presenting a remunerative target for atomic weapons or guided missiles. (12)

#### SELECTION OF THE MAIN LINE OF RESISTANCE

One of the first steps in preparing the defenses of a village or town is to locate the main line of resistance. In this respect there are four possible general locations that may be considered:

1. In front of or beyond the forward edge of the town:

Advantages of this location:

- a. The main defensive positions are relatively inconspicuous and will not be subject to the heavy fires that will be placed on the town behind them. (13)
- b. Defensive positions will very likely have long fields of fire covering the approaches. (14)
- c. Depth will be added to the defense, which may be an extremely important factor in the case of small villages. (15)

Disadvantages of this location:

- a. The protection and concealment afforded by the town are not fully utilized, and the main battle position is exposed to armored attacks. (16)
- b. Communication to and from the village is difficult, making it very likely that reserves located within the village proper would be unable to relieve or assist the units on the MLR.

(12) Personal opinion; (13) A-21; (14) A-27, p. 3; (15) Personal opinion; (16) A-27, p. 3.

2. Along the forward edge of the town:

Advantages of this location:

- a. Good fields of fire are available to the front.

Disadvantages of this location:

- a. The battle position will be subjected to concentrated direct and indirect fires, enemy tanks will be able to demolish the forward positions by merely standing off out of range of the antitank defenses and pumping shells into the buildings.
- b. There is danger that units on the MLR will be pinned down by the assaulting fires and not be able to repel the enemy infantry as it moves into the position. (17)

3. Inside the town: (The distance the MLR will be placed inside the town will be determined by the size of the town, nature of the buildings, layout of the streets, and the size of the defending forces. Though no exact distance can be stated, a general rule is that the positions should be far enough back so that artillery and direct fire tank guns engaging the forward edge of the town, will not inflict casualties among the troops occupying the MLR, yet it must not be placed so far back that the enemy can get a secure grip within the village area.) (18)

Advantages of this position:

- a. Maximum use is made of the cover and protective capabilities of the built-up area, the enemy cannot deliver accurate supporting fires on the main battle position. (19)
- b. The attack is canalized and broken up into small units that can be dealt with individually. (20)
- c. Attacking forces have difficulty in determining the strength and location of defending units, and are exposed to surprise action and flanking fires. (21)

(17) A-21; (18) Personal opinion; (19) A-21; (20) A-6, p. 111;  
(21) A-2, p. 96.

#### Disadvantages of this location:

a. Observation and fields of fire are reduced. (22)

b. There is a possibility that the attacker may be able to establish himself in the forward edge of the town without serious resistance. (23)

4. In rear of the town: No attempt will be made to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of such a position, since it is hardly a characteristic one in that it forfeits all the advantages offered by the built-up area. However, it must be understood that in special situations a village can be defended in such a manner; for instance, it might be desirable to deny the enemy the use of a village by fire from over-watching positions to the rear and to the flanks.

It is neither possible nor desirable to make a positive rule concerning the location of the MLR since, as in any tactical situation, there are so many variables that must be evaluated. (24) A recommended solution is to place the MLR within the town or village, and to employ local security elements on the forward edge of the town to disrupt and delay the attack and to observe the speed, composition, and direction of the assault forces. (25)

#### BOUNDARIES

The next point to consider is the location of boundaries between the units. In this case, the selection of boundaries is quite important, particularly in view of the fact that our field manuals are somewhat contradictory on this point. (26) In discussing the defense of built-up areas FM 7-20 states, "Boundaries are placed along streets which are perpendicular to the main line of resistance." (27) FM 31-50 has this to say on the same subject, "Boundaries are usually located in streets and limiting points at

(22) A-2, p. 61; (23) A-26, p. 48; (24) A-21; (25) A-3, p. 201;  
(26) Personal opinion; (27) A-3, p. 201.

street intersections." (28) On the other hand, in a general discussion of the organization of defensive positions, FM 100-5 declares, "Boundaries are located so that there will be no question of the responsibility for the defense of the key terrain which dominates a critical avenue of hostile approach." (29)

The Infantry School and most of our field manuals imply that boundaries must run down the middle of streets so that the areas of unit responsibility will be clearly defined; (30) the idea apparently being that, with such an easily recognizable feature as a street for a boundary, all personnel on the MTR will be completely oriented. Actually this advantage is one of convenience and adds no real strength to the position. Careful supervision and instruction by the unit commanders will accomplish the same end regardless of where the boundaries are. Certainly this advantage cannot balance the consequences of an enemy armored thrust up a poorly secured boundary. (31)

In organizing the defense of any type built-up area, streets must be considered as extremely dangerous avenues of approach, particularly for armored elements. (32) The erection of obstacles and barricades in streets and avenues, and the coordination of these obstacles with the antitank fires is far too vital to have its responsibility divided between two commanders. Divided responsibility for such a weak link in the village defenses might well lead to disaster for the defender.

In the case of smaller villages, or where units of company size and less are preparing the defenses, boundaries may not play such an important part. The defense in such cases might consist of a few strongpoints protecting one or two road junctions, or other critical points. (33)

(28) A-2, p. 96; (29) A-1, p. 79; (30) A-3, p. 201; (31) Personal opinion; (32) A-12, p. 13; (33) Personal opinion.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE DEFENSES

Villages and towns should be organized for all around defense with special consideration given to the most likely directions of the enemy attack. These defenses will naturally include positions in front of the forward edge (or outside the perimeter) such as the OPLR, local security elements, or even the MLR itself. However, the organization of these positions would be very conventional, and only defenses actually within the built-up area itself will be discussed here. (34)

The defensive organization for a town or village is made up of three main parts; obstacles, the plan of fires, and plans for the use of reserves. (35)

Belts of obstacles of all descriptions must be constructed in depth beyond the perimeter of the village to stop, delay, or restrict the movement of enemy armor. These obstacles may take any form or shape, depending on the time, material, and manpower available to the defender. Selected bridges, culverts, and causeways should be demolished, and road blocks placed along the approaches. (36) All obstacles, barricades, and minefields must be covered by heavy fires, including antitank. Mines and booby traps should be sprinkled profusely among them. (37)

Within the village itself a complete system of obstacles should be thoroughly organized, designed to stop both tanks and personnel. Antitank obstacles must be erected in depth along every possible tank approach or route to prevent tanks from running up and down the position; however, care must be taken not to block routes of supply and evacuation to and from the village. Tank obstacles and traps are most effective when they are placed so they obtain an element of surprise, causing the tank to stop, hesitate, or turn so it can be more easily dealt with by the antitank defenses. (38) Antipersonnel obstacles should be constructed to force the attack into the

(34) A-3, p. 202; (35) A-30, p. 120; (36) A-24, p. 58; (37) A-1, p. 120;  
(38) A-2, p. 97.

lanes of fire. Debris and barbed wire are very suitable as obstacles, serving to keep the infantry elements in the killing zone a few seconds longer. (39) As in the case of the obstacles outside the village, there is no limit to the type and number that can be employed, and they too must be covered by fire and sprinkled with booby traps. (40) One important point that must be considered in placing obstacles is that they should not be constructed near firing positions, for the obstacles invariably draw heavy fire. (41)

The plan of fires is formed by the careful coordination of the fires of the strongpoints which form the backbone of the defensive system. The defensive organization is based on a network of mutually supporting strongpoints which are organized in depth or in successive belts. The defense is not effected by defense and occupation of every building and outhouse, for this would violate every principle of combat. Strongpoints are nothing more than areas of unit resistance prepared for all around defense. In a small town or village the typical strongpoint would consist of a compact group of houses defended by a reinforced platoon.

The integration of the fires of the various strongpoints into an overall fire plan, though difficult, is considerably more important than in normal defensive situations. This coordination is particularly important because of the fact that the action within the village becomes so decentralized and is conducted primarily by small units in more or less independent action, and because of the limitations on fields of fire and observation during periods of reduced visibility. (42) The difficulty in coordinating these fires arises from the lack of control cited above, and because of the reduced fields of fire for all weapons, which are normally narrow and seldom longer than 100 to 150 yards. (43)

Firing positions within each strongpoint must be so sited that they

(39) A-11, p. 3; (40) A-2, p. 97; (41) A-24, p. 58; (42) A-23, p. 75;  
(43) A-17, p. 13.

establish killing zones in the open areas and streets and cover the approaches to adjacent strongpoints, and are in turn protected by fires from other strongpoints. Detailed firing data must be prepared at each firing position to include ranges to all critical points and approaches, and to all adjacent strongpoints so that an enemy penetration may be readily sealed off. (44) Several alternate and supplementary positions must be prepared for each firing position, not only for occupation in the event the primary position is made untenable, but to deceive the enemy as to the true strength and location of the defenses by frequent changes of position. (45)

If the fire plan may be considered the backbone of the defense, the reserve force may be called its "Sunday Punch". It is well recognized that no amount of obstacles or protective fires can keep a determined enemy from entering the defensive positions. Any effective defense must employ sufficient reserves to stop the attacker and expel him from the positions, for unless the penetration is ejected at once it will be but a short time before all the advantages of the defense are lost.

In determining the proportion of the forces to be held out as reserves and where they will be located, the primary consideration is the necessity for making an immediate counterattack to nip off any penetration. In street fighting the initial enemy penetrations are certain to be made by small units or assault teams that will not be able to exploit their gains or consolidate their position. Since control and communication are even more difficult for the attacker than the defender, it will be some time before any penetration can be reinforced or protective fires coordinated in front of it. (46)

It is obvious that the most successful counterattacks will be those that are made at once; otherwise the roles of the combatants will be reversed and the defender will be wasting his strength in costly house to (44) A-23, p. 75; (45) A-3, p. 204; (46) A-18, p. 6, incl. 2.



house fighting against superior numbers. (47) British doctrine, based on their experiences in World War II, is that a counterattack must be launched within ten to thirty minutes after the penetration is made, or else it will serve no useful purpose. They feel that it will take at least ten minutes to get any kind of organized attack going, but that to delay more than thirty minutes will allow the attacker time to reorganize and reinforce his assault forces, and that it will require a full dress attack to dislodge them. (48)

Speedy counterattacks require that small bodies of reserves be readily available near or within the forward belt of strongpoints. This can be accomplished by having some sort of reserve element within each strongpoint, platoon, company and battalion (though this is seldom possible for obvious reasons) prepared to counterattack any penetration occurring in or near their area. (49)

It might be noted that it is a tactical principle of the United States Army, that the support platoon of a front line rifle company should rarely be used to make a counterattack. (50) While this is a sound rule for the conventional type of defense, it is not generally applicable to street fighting, where forces of any size may and should be employed in a counter-attack role. While this statement may be open to criticism on the grounds that such tactics would permit reserves to be defeated in detail, there are extenuating factors. Speed is so important that to trust the entire counter-attack mission to one central reserve, which could not possibly move as fast as a smaller local reserve, would jeopardize the entire position. Another point that cannot be ignored is that communications and control are so vulnerable during the heat of battle that each local commander should have his own reserves or run the risk of doing without any at the critical moment. (51)

Whatever the situation, or regardless of the limited number of troops

(47) Personal opinion; (48) Recent statement of Major Arthur H. Fraser, Canadian Army; (49) A-24, p. 75; (50) A-31, p. 76; (51) Personal opinion.

defending the area, a general reserve must be held out by the village commander. In some cases this reserve may be kept in covered positions behind the village where it may be held in readiness to move out on a counterattack mission, as well as to fall on the flank of enemy elements attempting to encircle the defenses. (52)

Complete plans for the employment of all reserve elements must be prepared, to include troops to be used, routes of counterattack, supporting fires, and methods of control. All plans should be rehearsed in detail, and troops should be walked through all the various plans until they are so thoroughly familiar with them that there will be no hesitation or bungling in their actual execution.

In the organization of a village for the defense manpower soon becomes a critical problem, for it is a characteristic of built-up areas that there never seems to be enough men to defend them. (53) Small unit commanders are prone to claim they do not have enough personnel to man their positions, let alone hold out a reserve. (54) This condition is aggravated by the common tendency to put too many men in each house, though most houses can be adequately defended with two to ten men. (55) One of the most important points that the village commander must check is the proper utilization and disposition of manpower, or else he will find his strongpoints over-manned, his reserves inadequate, and his construction program far behind schedule. (56)

#### SELECTION AND PREPARATION OF DEFENSIVE POSITIONS

Houses and other defensive sites within inhabited areas are selected for their tactical usefulness, (57) fields of fire, strength, and unobtrusiveness. In the normal defensive situation the fields of fire are the most important consideration, but in towns and villages protection against

(52) A-1, p. 120; (53) A-18, p. 6, Incl. 2; (54) Personal opinion;  
(55) A-15, p. 5; (56) Personal opinion; (57) A-17, p. 11.

the direct fire of tanks is just as important, if not more. (58) Corner houses, while having the best fields of fire, are not generally recommended as defensive positions since they are so obvious and certain to draw heavy fire. On the other hand, houses in the middle of the block or lying further back from the road than adjoining houses are inconspicuous, fairly well protected from enemy fires, and usually make suitable positions.

There are numerous measures that should be undertaken to improve the defensive value of houses, time permitting. A few of the more important expedients are: (59)

1. Improvement of fields of fire:

a. Remove hedges, walls, fences, and small buildings that might obstruct the fields of fire, though this must be done as inconspicuously as possible. (60)

b. Large numbers of loopholes should be punched through the walls at various heights in order to cover all possible avenues of approach. These loopholes should be prepared so that they may be blocked with sandbags when not in use, (61) and should be funnel shaped with the smaller opening on the outside to prevent grenades from being thrown in and to allow for traverse of weapons. (62)

2. Fireproofing:

a. All inflammable materials such as rugs, curtains, drapes, and furniture should be removed.

b. Extinguishers, water buckets, and barrels of sand or dirt should be kept on hand to fight fires. (63)

3. Strengthening:

a. Emplacements, with overhead cover, should be built for each weapon and should be shored up as a precaution against the collapse of walls or ceilings.

(58) A-30, p. 118; (59) A-15, p. 6; (60) A-2, p. 107; (61) A-2, p. 108;  
(62) A-25, p. 24; (63) A-15, p. 9.

b. Floors, roofs, and walls should be bullet-proofed by the construction of false walls, ceilings, and floors or through the use of sandbags and natural debris.

c. Glass should be removed from all windows to prevent casualties from flying glass.

d. Entrances to all buildings should be carefully barricaded and/or booby-trapped, however care must be taken to leave a line of withdrawal from each position. (64)

e. Basements or deep dugouts should be prepared under each building to be defended for use as a shelter during bombardments, and as a storage place for extra stocks of food, water, ammunition and other supplies. (65)

f. Screens or wire netting should be placed over windows to prevent grenades from being thrown in; slits or flaps may be cut in the netting so that grenades may be thrown out.

g. Lattice work and drain spouts should be removed to prevent the enemy from climbing the sides of buildings. (66)

#### 4. Concealment:

a. Care must be taken that weapons do not disclose their firing positions by raising large clouds of dust. This can be prevented by clearing all dust and debris from around the gun, and carefully watering this area down.

b. Weapons must be fired well back from all windows or openings.

c. All external signs of occupation must be removed from each building. (67)

#### 5. Deception:

a. All houses should be made to look alike from the  
(64) A-15, p. 9-10; (65) A-23, p. 75; (66) A-2, p. 111; (67) A-15, p. 10.

outside by preparing loopholes in all of them, removing all of their window panes, spreading wire netting over all windows, and constructing dummy fields of fire.

b. All houses should be barricaded and booby-trapped. (68)

So far this study has been limited to the defense of houses, though it must not be implied that all defensive positions within a village must be indoors. There are many advantages to placing troops and weapons in debris, ruins, and trenches. Such positions are invulnerable to incendiary attack, are not so dangerous during artillery or aerial bombardment, and enable firing positions to obtain surprise that they might not be able to obtain from within buildings. Positions outside of buildings are excellent locations for lurking tank-hunter teams. (69)

It can be readily seen that a definite construction plan must be prepared in order that available time, labor, and materials are efficiently employed. Generally speaking priorities of work will be as for any defensive position, except that here the first priority is the construction of antitank obstacles and barricades (70), while communications are installed concurrently. (71) Civilian labor should be utilized where possible to avoid wearing the troops out. (72)

#### THE EMPLOYMENT OF WEAPONS

The peculiarities of village fighting exercise a considerable influence on the use of many of the weapons normally employed by the infantry battalion. The primary factors are the difficulty of control, limited observation and fields of fire, and the tendency toward small unit actions. As in the case of reserves, the big question is whether to retain them under central control or to attach to subordinate units, or easily massed fires versus quick supporting fire for each strongpoint.

(68) A-15, p. 10; (69) A-24, p. 58; (70) A-27, p. 9, (71) A-3, p. 170;  
(72) A-24, p. 24.

Automatic weapons are employed in their normal role of providing bands of protective fires around the strongpoints and the battle position itself. Since fields of fire are normally short and it is best to have as many bands of automatic fire as possible, machine guns are more often employed singly than in pairs. (73) The greater number of the machine guns employed by the local covering forces along the forward edge of the village should be of the water-cooled type. Within the village there will be little opportunity to exploit their greater accuracy and range, and, in spite of their greater weight, it will be relatively easy to withdraw them to the rear because of the short distances involved. (74) With this one exception, no distinction need be made in emplacing light and heavy machine guns. The best positions for machine guns are close to the ground level or in cellars, where they may obtain maximum grazing fire. (75)

It is in the case of mortars that the real question of control comes in - who gets the guns? As a general rule the 60mm mortars should be attached to platoon strongpoints so that each platoon leader will have an indirect fire weapon for immediate use. Moreover, it is difficult to employ this mortar in battery within a built-up area. In the event the battalion has a platoon of 4.2 inch mortars attached it would appear logical to attach a section of 81mm mortars to each of the front line companies in order to avoid over-centralization. (76) Villages may often have such little depth that consideration may have to be given to emplacing mortars in covered positions to its rear, however interrupted communications can make this a costly procedure so it should only be done under extreme conditions. (77) When possible cellars should be prepared as firing positions for mortars, if this cannot be done, well constructed positions with overhead cover for protection against artillery fires must be prepared. (78) Mortars should stock a large amount of smoke shells to be used in sealing

(73) A-3, p. 204; (74) Personal opinion; (75) A-3, p. 204; (76) A-26, p. 51; (77) Personal opinion; (78) A-32, p. 67.

off enemy assault units from their supporting weapons, and to blind and confuse attacking elements, especially tanks.

Rocket launchers are the principal weapons used for close-in antitank defense. They are habitually employed by tank-hunter teams or are emplaced where they may cover tank approaches and antitank obstacles. Unfortunately, the present allocation of these weapons within the infantry regiment does not provide for their best possible use in a defensive situation where enemy armor is the major threat. (79) The bulk of the rocket launchers in the infantry battalion are of the 2.36 inch type; on the other hand there are only eleven of the 3.5 inch rocket launchers in the infantry battalion, none of these being in the rifle companies, while there are some twenty-three in the regimental special units. (80) While the 2.36 inch rocket launcher is a fine weapon against the more lightly armored tanks, it is not powerful enough to deal with some of the better known foreign tanks; for example, the Russian Joseph Stalin III. The most potent antitank weapon in the infantry regiment and the only one that can effectively score penetrations on that very formidable tank is the 3.5 inch rocket launcher. (81) The battalion or company commander charged with the defense of a village should request that he be allotted as many of the regimental 3.5 inch launchers as possible, exchanging 2.36 inch launchers for them if necessary. The heavier ammunition of the larger weapon should present no problem in this static situation since it is possible to stock large amounts of ammunition at the firing positions. (82)

Artillery is employed much the same as in any defense; concentrations and barrages are planned for all critical approaches and open areas, to limit penetrations, and to support counterattacks. (83) However, the rule that artillery concentrations should be at least 100 to 200 yards in front of friendly troops must be more or less discarded. Artillery fire has to

(79) Personal opinion; (80) A-28, Chart 9; (81) Recent statement of Lt. Col. George Pickett; (82) Personal opinion; (83) A-3, p. 204.

be laid very close to the firing positions in order to be fully effective and to stop enemy infantry from overrunning the position during periods of poor visibility. Since the defending troops are usually in well protected positions with overhead cover it should be possible to bring down fire practically on top of the strongpoints with little or no risk. (84)

Tanks are employed in two principal roles; antitank and counterattack. Numerous protected firing positions should be prepared for tanks throughout the defensive position for occupation to repel armored thrusts. In order to avoid confusion and to secure maximum use of supporting tanks, routes of movement through the defense area must be very carefully worked out permitting tanks to shift position rapidly without leaving vulnerable routes of approach open to hostile armor. (85) Consideration should be given to placing, initially, a large percentage of the tanks with the local security forces on the perimeter so that the long range tank guns may be employed to best advantage. (86)

Like the tank, the 75mm recoilless rifle should be used where possible on the perimeter of the village to provide long range antitank fires. The forces on the perimeter should be exceptionally strong in long range antitank weapons; probably half of the available weapons in this category should be initially placed along the forward edge. The considerations here are that there are relatively few antitank weapons available to the battalion commander that can take advantage of the long fields of fire, and cover the obstacles around the village. On the other hand, there are sufficient short range antitank weapons available to combat the tanks once they reach the village. The danger of compromising these weapons is relatively slim, since well protected firing positions can be built, and unusually short covered routes of withdrawal are available. (87)

Grenades of all types are extensively used in village fighting. Smoke

(84) Personal opinion; (85) A-9, p. 4; (86) Personal opinion;

(87) Personal opinion.



grenades, in particular, are valuable, for they provide cover for small bodies of troops moving in the open, and make effective weapons in room to room fighting. (88) Antitank and sticky grenades must be provided to augment the other antitank weapons. (89)

Ammunition requirements are abnormally high in village fighting and must be carefully considered when planning the defenses. Not only are expenditure rates much higher than in normal combat, but large amounts should be placed on all alternate and supplementary positions. Furthermore, since protracted fighting may prevent resupply, extra stocks must be provided within the defenses. (90)

#### COMMAND, CONTROL, AND COMMUNICATION

It has been repeatedly emphasized throughout this study that lack of control, caused by decentralization of command, lack of observation for the commander, and the difficulty of maintaining communications, is perhaps the most perplexing problem of the commander. (91) Actually, maintenance of communications is the key to the whole problem since command and control must be decentralized in view of the possibility that communications might fail at the most critical moment.

To achieve the maximum degree of efficiency every possible means of communication must be employed. Since radio is not dependable in built-up areas, reliance must be placed on messengers and wire.

Messengers, including numerous alternates, must be made familiar with the primary and alternate locations of all command posts and critical defensive points. Messengers must be walked over all routes that will be used so that they will make no mistake, either during day or night. (92) In order to provide covered routes for messengers as well as for reserve forces, covered routes of communication must be provided by digging

(88) A-15, p. 23; (89) A-16, p. 43; (90) A-26, p. 51; (91) A-5, p. 107;  
(92) A-26, p. 50.

communication trenches or connecting houses by joining their cellars or walls. (93)

Wire nets should include all command posts, strongpoints, observation posts, and security groups. At least two, preferably more, lines should be laid to each position - underground where possible. Local telephone systems should be utilized to augment military nets. (94)

Communication plans must include provision for sound and visual signals of all types to be employed in the event of emergency. (95)

In the absence of reliable communications commanders must plan to maintain control by the early issue of detailed instructions and careful supervision of all operations. This does not restrict the independence of subordinate leaders, but is so that they may properly exercise their initiative in the event communications fail. A successful defense, most assuredly, depends on every man knowing his own job and the jobs of the men around him. (96)

One problem of command that assumes added importance in this type of operation is that of morale. The rifleman or machinegunner in his combat post seldom sees more than one or two others of his squad or platoon. He has no assurance that the men around him are holding on, he rarely sees his leaders, he has little knowledge of what is happening or what is going to happen, and he is demoralized by the continuous enemy fires; naturally he is depressed and afraid. While there is no complete solution to this problem there are many things that can be done to alleviate it. First, every man must be kept as fully informed of the situation as is possible - not merely to enable him to perform his duties more efficiently, but primarily to allay his fears and to reassure him. (97) Communications must be established to every possible position, even if it only consists of sound power phones connecting adjoining firing positions. Commanders (93) A-2, p. 103; (94) A-26, p. 50; (95) A-2, p. 103; (96) Personal opinion; (97) A-18, p. 2, Incl. 2.

must visit their subordinates as often as possible, before and during the fighting. Aggressive patrols should be dispatched to help raise morale by breaking the monotony of waiting for the enemy to attack. (98)

#### CONDUCT OF THE DEFENSE

As the enemy forces approach the village it is their tanks which present the major threat. Enemy armor has two immediate capabilities; it can stand off out of range of the bulk of the antitank weapons and systematically demolish the forward edge of the village, or it can charge the village attempting to overwhelm the defenses. This latter operation was a favorite German tactic in Russia during the late war. Many Russian villages were overrun by the weight and momentum of the German tank attacks. Belts of obstacles and antitank weapons around the perimeter prevent the employment of such rash and impetuous tactics. (99)

When the enemy attack commences, local security groups on the perimeter adjust artillery and mortar fire, cover the obstacles with direct fire, and report on the movement of enemy elements. Since this phase of the attack is normally accompanied by heavy artillery fires, troops within the main battle position remain under cover in cellars or dugouts until the assault forces near the MLR. As the enemy moves in he comes under increasingly heavy concentrations of preplanned artillery and mortar fire.

(100) Well concealed strongpoints engage the attacking troops with surprise flanking fires. This is the hard core of the resistance; Russian experience indicates that the worst part of village fighting was the demoralizing effect of surprise fire from the defending strongpoints. (101)

In the event of a penetration, close-in artillery fires are brought down to block it off. Counterattack is the key word here; the enemy must be thrown out at once by the nearest available forces supported by fires from

(98) Personal opinion; (99) A-24, p. 58; (100) A-30, p. 120;

(101) A-24, p. 55.

nearby strongpoints. As previously stated emphasis is on speed, not numbers; counterattacks should be spontaneous not ponderous. (102)

Throughout the action antitank defense must be vigorously and aggressively conducted. A study of defensive actions in World War II shows that when villages or towns were overrun it was almost invariably because their antitank defenses had failed, and tanks were running wild over the position. (103) From the time that contact is first made with hostile tanks every effort must be made to separate them from each other and from accompanying infantry so that they may be more easily destroyed by antitank fire or tank-hunter teams. Tanks may be isolated from their supporting infantry by automatic weapons fire, but principally by timed fire brought down over the assaulting tank-infantry teams. As has been previously stated there must be no hesitation in bringing this fire down right in front of the defensive positions when necessary to stop such an attack. Artillery and mortar smoke concentrations should be used to separate the tanks from each other and from their supporting infantry, as well as to blind and confuse them. (104) In the event that an enemy tank penetrates the defenses it must not be allowed to remain within the position where it can spread destruction and confusion; it must be sought out and destroyed at once by small aggressive tank-hunter teams armed with rocket launchers, antitank grenades, smoke pots or smoke grenades, and flamethrowers. (105)

At night or during periods of low visibility the defenses of a built-up area become very vulnerable; it is relatively easy for enemy units to infiltrate the position and overrun individual strongpoints. Aggressive patrols must be sent out at night to maintain contact with the enemy and at the same time restrict their movements. Flares should be used profusely to illuminate the more dangerous areas or avenues of approach. (106)

(102) A-23, p. 75; (103) Personal opinion; (104) A-18, p. 7, Incl. 2; (105) A-30, p. 120; (106) Personal opinion.

In order to keep the enemy in ignorance of the location of the strongpoints activity around the position must be held to a minimum during the day. All necessary movement, including resupply and evacuation, should be accomplished at night. At night, defenses may be shifted to deceive the enemy or to improve their defensive value. (107)

The remainder of this study will be devoted to an examination and analysis of four small unit actions in World War II involving the defense of small towns or villages in order to underline the more important points that have been considered.

THE DEFENSE OF BOOS, FRANCE  
BY A "GROUPE FRANC" (FRENCH ARMY UNIT)  
7-8 JUNE 1940  
MAP A

In 1940 the French Army activated several special infantry units, which were known as "Groupe Francs", to combat German armor. These units were to be GHQ troops and were to be attached to corps and divisions as the situation indicated. The Groupes were company sized units of about 250 men organized into five platoons; a tank platoon, an armored car platoon, a motorcycle platoon, an antitank platoon, and a motorized infantry platoon. The major items of equipment of these groupes included five medium tanks, five armored cars, two 47mm antitank guns, two 25mm antitank guns, and assorted trucks and motorcycles equipped with machine guns. (108)

On 7 June 1940 one of the "Groupe Francs" was ordered to defend Boos, a small village north of the river Seine and a few miles southeast of Rouen. The purpose of this defense was to deny the use of a vital road to the advancing Germans, and to delay the advance of a German armored column that had broken through the French lines and was speeding toward Rouen. (109)

That afternoon the groupe or company arrived in Boos prepared to establish a defensive position. A reconnaissance party under the executive (107) A-2, p. 97; (108) A-34, p. 1; (109) A-34, p. 5.

officer arrived in the village a few minutes ahead of the main body to lay out a hasty defense and to assign position areas to each platoon. As the company rolled into the village each platoon leader was given a sketch showing him his initial area of responsibility and the exact location of each vehicle. This prevented confusion and milling around within the village and at the same time placed every vehicle in a concealed position in a very few minutes - concealment from aerial observation was an important factor since the Germans ruled the air. As the column closed into the village local security was put out; tanks were sent out several hundred yards on each road, and the antitank guns were quickly placed in temporary positions around the perimeter covering the main roads.

As the company commander planned his defenses he had to consider the following factors; there were no friendly troops close enough to come to his aid, there were more roads leading into the village than he could defend with his antitank guns, and the village was far too large to cover with the limited resources at his disposal. It was finally decided that the defenses would be concentrated around the main road junctions in the vicinity of Vert Pot, using strongpoints to defend the main roads. (110)

The antitank guns were set in position to provide all-around defense; the two 47mm guns were emplaced to defend to the southeast as the most likely avenue of attack, while the lighter guns covered the roads leading to Rouen. The guns were dug into the ground about fifty yards from the road they were covering, and emplacements were prepared to provide a maximum of cover and concealment for them. (111) Light machine guns were put in position near each of the antitank guns as protection against hostile infantry.

Work was begun at once on roadblocks which were placed on all avenues of approach into the position. In this particular case the (110) A-34, p. 7; (111) A-34, p. 8.

*the road*  
roadblocks were constructed by piling up such heavy articles as tractors, plows, and wagons, then lashing them together with heavy cable, topping it all off with heavy trees. Care was taken to place the roadblocks so they could not be by-passed; they were positioned between two heavily built houses, or minefields were laid alongside the blocks. Where possible the roadblocks were so located that they could be covered by antitank fire; guns were sighted so that they covered the exact spot that it was felt the tanks would halt or hesitate when they first sighted the roadblocks.

As soon as both the roadblocks and antitank gun positions had been completed the tanks were pulled back into the center of the village where they were placed in covered positions and camouflaged, and held in readiness as a reserve or counterattacking force. (112) At the same time, three of the armored cars were sent out well beyond the range of vision of the defenders to serve as distant warning or observation posts. Posts were established along roads B and C, and beyond La Croix.

The infantry and motorcycle platoons prepared positions in and around the village proper, placing the bulk of their automatic weapons in the gardens and orchards to cover the surrounding fields. However, some positions were prepared within buildings and machine guns emplaced there to provide a strongpoint in the village proper, should the Germans penetrate the antitank defenses. (113)

To provide the necessary control, wire was laid to all gun positions while all tanks and armored cars were netted in by radio with the Command Post. (114)

Early on the morning of 8 June two motorized patrols swept the surrounding area for signs of the enemy; except for some vague information from refugees that Germans were coming from the north the results were negative. (115)

(112) A-34, p. 9; (113) A-34, p. 10; (114) A-34, p. 12; (115) A-34, p. 11.

At about 1600 of the same day, a French colonel, purporting himself to be from Corps Headquarters arrived at the village. He instructed the Groupe commander to allow fourteen French tanks to proceed through the village on their way to reinforce Rouen; these tanks would be recognized by the fact that their turrets would be open and that they would be flying white flags. This procedure seemed somewhat peculiar to the village commander who radioed Corps for confirmation; Corps, of course, had no knowledge of any such tank movement. With this news, all elements of the command were alerted for a tank attack and ordered to their posts.

Shortly after 1630, antitank gun 1 reported that a column of armored vehicles was approaching from Puits Guerard. Within a short time the tanks could be seen by the whole village - their turrets open, and flying white flags. A motorcyclist was sent out to meet the tanks, but when he had travelled about half the distance to them he saw that they were German. He spun around and headed back for the village; with this move the tanks closed their turrets and commenced firing at the cyclist, soon bringing him down. (116)

As the armored column moved in toward the village it was noted that it consisted of fourteen medium tanks, without supporting infantry or armored cars.

At this time, the village commander ordered the three armored cars on outpost duty to pull back to the village at once.

Antitank gun 1 commenced firing when the head of the tank column was at a range of about 800 yards, knocking the lead tank out with its second shot. Next, it engaged the second tank, which was by this time firing high explosive shells at the forward edge of the village; (117) this tank was also knocked out without too much delay. At this, the remainder of the column hesitated momentarily, then, the next three tanks (116) A-34, p. 12; (117) A-34, p. 13.



in column came charging straight down the road, firing as they came. Anti-tank gun 1 also succeeded in knocking out the third of these three tanks; the first two tanks then swung about and joined six of the other tanks that had turned south towards road C. Antitank gun 1 continued to engage these tanks, knocking one out just as it cleared road C.

In the meantime, the company commander had ordered his tank platoon to counterattack. Three of the tanks were to move out road A past the church and come from behind La Murette to engage the German tanks, while the other two tanks were to move out on road D and turn east at H in order to hit the Germans from the rear. (118) This section of two tanks succeeded in surprising three German tanks that had remained in the vicinity of road junction G, destroying one and driving the other two off to the south.

As the German tanks came streaming south, armored car 1, which had not withdrawn as ordered, moved out to engage them. At the same time, fortunately for the armored car, the main group of three French tanks came sweeping around La Murette and charged into the German tanks. Their timely arrival very likely saved antitank gun 1, which by this time was receiving intense and accurate fire from the German tanks. In the ensuing tank fight, the French and Germans each lost one tank. (119)

By this time the German tanks were moving into the wooded area directly south of Boos, so the French tanks broke off their pursuit. However, the armored car continued its pursuit and, incidentally, was never heard of again. (120) (2:28) *W.D.*

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

Though this action was terminated before rifle elements became involved and the success of the defense owes much to the ill-conceived plan of attack, it is an excellent illustration of the use of a built-up area (118) A-34, p. 14; (119) A-34, p. 15; (120) A-34, p. 16.

as an antitank obstacle, of the technique of preparing antitank defenses, and of the use of a reserve or counterattack element.

This action is a typical example of what a small unit, say a company or battalion, might be called on to perform in a fluid situation. In this case, a small unit was ordered to delay a superior armored force and at the same time deprive him of key roads. Obviously, such a mission can be best accomplished securing a critical terrain feature that dominates the roads in question and has strong defensive capabilities, particularly antitank. Invariably, a small built-up area, which is in itself a natural antitank obstacle, will best satisfy these requirements, as was demonstrated here.

It is significant that the commander's first and principal concern was the establishment and the coordination of his antitank defenses. This can almost be stated as a hard and fast rule in any situation involving the defense of a built-up area. The theme of this study has been that infantry cannot overrun a village in one quick drive while it has been proven again and again that armor can. The antitank defenses here might well serve as a model for others; obstacles and guns were emplaced as part of a carefully worked out plan to make maximum use of limited resources.

At first glance, the reserve held out might appear too large, considering the size of the unit and the magnitude of the mission. Since one of the basic principles used to determine the size of a reserve is that the weaker the defenses the stronger the reserve, it is felt that the commander arrived at a sound solution in this respect. However, it does not appear that the commander contemplated any use for his tank elements in other than a counterattack role. If the German attack had been supported by antitank weapons and infantry it might not have been possible to make such a bold counterattack. Some consideration should have been given to employing the tanks from covered positions within the village, using

them in a mobile antitank role, though here, they were properly employed.

(121)

*Ref*  
THE DEFENSE OF SCHMIDT, GERMANY  
BY THE 3RD BATTALION, 112TH INFANTRY, 28TH DIVISION  
3-4 NOVEMBER 1944  
MAP B

On 2 November 1944, the 28th Division launched an attack to capture the small village of Schmidt, which was of strategic value to both the Allies and the Germans. (122) Schmidt commanded one of the larger Roer River dams, was on German main supply routes, and was behind the main defenses of the Siegfried Line. (123)

At 1430 on 3 November, the first elements of the 3rd Battalion, 112th Infantry, which had been attacking southeast entered Schmidt. (124) However, it was not until just before dark that the rifle companies closed into the village, consequently the village was not completely cleared when darkness fell. Sporadic small arms fire was still coming from a small strip of buildings on the Hasenfield road on the southeast edge of town (125) as the battalion ceased its mopping up operations and commenced to organize the position.

A perimeter defense was established around the town, and for the most part the positions were dug in; little use was made of the buildings. Company L, with a section of heavy machine guns attached, was made responsible for the area between the Harscheidt and Hasenfield roads; its 1st platoon on the right, *left* and the 2nd platoon in the center, while the 3rd platoon was on the left astride the Hasenfield road. (126) Company K, also with a section of heavy machine guns attached, was defending to the south and southwest between the Hasenfield and Strauch roads. (127) Company I prepared positions just north of town, the 2nd platoon on the northeast, the

(121) Personal opinion; (122) A-35, p. 8; (123) A-35, p. 1;

(124) A-35, p. 37; (125) A-35, p. 39; (126) A-35, p. 54; (127) A-35, p. 62.

3rd platoon on the northwest. (128) The 1st platoon was on guard duty at division headquarters, and the mortar section had become separated from the company during the day's fighting and had not yet rejoined it. (129) The remaining heavy machine gun platoon went into position on the northwestern edge of town, covering approaches from that direction. The 81mm mortar platoon prepared positions at the northern edge of town. (130)

*some would be shown -*

Antitank defenses were almost totally lacking. Company A, 707th Tank Battalion, which was in support of this battalion had tried to get forward from Vossenack during the late afternoon, but it had so much difficulty with the almost impassable roads that it had postponed further efforts till morning. (131) The battalion antitank platoon had also failed to keep up with the battalion because of the poor roads; it too planned to try to get through the first thing in the morning. (132) Shortly after midnight a supply train of three weasels negotiated the tortuous roads, bringing in, among other things, all of sixty antitank mines. These were laid across the hard-surfaced roads from Harscheidt, Harsenfeld, and Strauch, but were not buried or camouflaged in any manner. Antitank obstacles or barricades were not prepared. The battalion commander sent a request to regiment for tank support back with the weasels, though this train could not possibly reach regiment until dawn, while the battalion had contact with regiment by wire and radio.

To round out the defenses, artillery and mortar fires were plotted and tied in with other defensive fires. (133)

Shortly after 0700 on 4 November, heavy concentrations of enemy artillery fire began to shake the town. For over thirty minutes this shelling moved up and down the length of the town. (134) About 0745, the 2nd platoon of Company I reported about sixty men moving about in a lightly wooded area approximately 1000 yards to the northeast. Since the company

(128) A-35, p. 62; (129) A-35, p. 40; (130) A-35, p. 62; (131) A-35, p. 52; (132) A-35, p. 55; (133) A-35, p. 55; (134) A-35, p. 61.

commander did not have any communication with his platoons he went down to the platoon in order to size up the situation. His forward observer called for artillery fires, but for some reason they never materialized. (135)

Troops on Company L's left noted the movement of small numbers of riflemen into the little hamlet of <sup>ZUBENTCHEN</sup> ~~Zuleneher~~. However, machine gun and 81mm mortar fire soon forced these Germans to withdraw back into the woods. Company L was having more difficulty on its right; enemy infantry were attacking along the Hasenfield road supported by automatic weapons fire from the still uncleared buildings in that vicinity. (136) At the same time, small groups of enemy riflemen were attacking and infiltrating through Company K's defenses on the south, and were making a nuisance of themselves in the rear of Company L. (137)

So far the American artillery had rendered little or no support in spite of early requests. It was almost 0830 before any support came, and that was a small concentration delivered on personnel in Harscheidt at the request of an air OP. (138) It was not until 0850 - over an hour after the German infantry assault had commenced - that the artillery delivered an effective support. At that time they brought down a concentration of over 200 rounds on a group of enemy tanks forming to the east of town. After this, the division artillery rendered maximum fire support.

About 0900, the German attack really got under way, with one battalion and five tanks attacking from the direction of Harscheidt, while a similar force was moving in from the direction of Hasenfield. The enemy tanks moved up the two main roads with practically no opposition, pumping shells continually. Bazooka fire was ineffective; here and there hits were made, but apparently without effect. The relentless advance of the tanks against the puny defenses was more demoralizing to the defenders than was the effects of the tank fire. (139) As the tanks reached the edge of town (135) A-35, p. 62; (136) A-35, p. 63; (137) A-35, p. 64; (138) A-35, p. 64; (139) A-35, p. 65.

they merely by-passed the easily visible antitank mines that were laid across the roads and continued on their destructive way right into the heart of town.

The situation was rapidly becoming impossible. Company K cracked first, many of its men pulling out individually and fleeing to the German held woods to the southwest to escape the crushing attack. (140) The first platoon, with the company section of light machine guns, heard a rumor that the order to withdraw had come, and commenced a more or less orderly retreat back through Schmidt toward Kommerscheidt. (141) About thirty to forty men drifted back into Company L, reporting that their company had been completely overrun and that their attached heavy machine guns had either been destroyed or captured. (142)

When stragglers from Company K moved into his position, the 3rd platoon leader of Company L sent a patrol to the company CP to find out just what was going on. However, the Germans had by this time infiltrated the position so badly that this patrol was forced to return without ever reaching the CP. (143) In the meantime, the enemy tanks attacking from Harscheidt barrelled right through Company L's 1st platoon and onto the company mortar positions which they destroyed by direct fire. The 2nd platoon was also unable to hold its position in the face of this attack, it too withdrew in haste to the same German held woods to the southwest which part of Company K had fled into earlier. (144) By this time the 3rd platoon was the only front line platoon still in position. Seeing that his position was hopeless, the platoon leader attempted to withdraw back through the town, however enemy fires so broke up his withdrawal that only three or four men got out of town. (145)

The early disintegration of Company K placed the 3rd platoon of Company I under heavy attack. The company commander, who had remained with the 2nd

(140) A-35, p. 66; (141) A-35, p. 67; (142) A-35, p. 66; (143) A-35, p. 66;  
(144) A-35, p. 67; (145) A-35, p. 68.

platoon, sent a message directing that the platoon retire to the protection of the buildings to the north. The weight of the attack was so heavy that it was impossible for the platoon to break away and conduct an orderly movement to the rear; so this platoon melted rapidly away, most of the men heading toward the woods to the north and west. (146)

In a vain effort to hold the town, the command post groups of Companies L and K attempted to organize a line of resistance through the center of Schmidt. Confusion and panic were so widespread that this effort was doomed to failure from the outset. Before long, the rumor was passed around that an order for the withdrawal had been issued - that was enough to end this brief stand.

It was only 1000 and it was almost over. Schmidt was no longer defended by a combat unit, but was merely occupied by a few demoralized individuals. The battalion commander issued the almost superfluous order to withdraw and closed his command post. (147)

Here and there efforts were made to restore some sort of control and to halt what was almost a rout. The 1st platoon of Company K, which had succeeded in withdrawing back through the town, began to dig in just north of what used to be the battalion CP under the command of the battalion executive officer. Most of Company I withdrew safely into Kommerscheidt where it went into positions with Company A which was nervously awaiting its turn. (148) (2:34) *Wd*

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

This action points out the necessity for providing antitank defenses and the consequences of failing to do so. Clearly illustrated is the need of a definite defensive plan in order to maintain control.

Though it may be possible to lay a large share of the blame for this (146) A-35, p. 67; (147) A-35, p. 68; (148) A-35, p. 69.

pitiful defense to higher echelons or to circumstances beyond the control of the battalion, many fatal mistakes and omissions were made right on the ground. The principal local reasons for the collapse at Schmidt were the failure to provide adequate tank defenses, to provide an adequate system of communications, and - above all - to prepare some sort of a defense plan for the units to follow in the event the Germans penetrated the main defenses.

Admittedly, the battalion commander was working under extreme handicaps; the poor condition of the roads did make it difficult for tanks and antitank guns to get into position to support him. However, a study of the situation to the rear shows that during the night of 3-4 November little or no effort was made to bring any antitank support up in spite of the gravity of the situation. Moreover, the battalion commander contented himself with a request sent by motor over roads known to be next to impassable. It is almost certain that an urgent request by radio early in the evening would have brought at least three or four tanks to Schmidt before morning; these might well have turned the course of the battle in view of the relatively small number of German tanks involved. (149) It is interesting to note that the supporting tank company started forward about 0500 and reached Kommerscheidt about 1030 - much too late. (150) Had these tanks continued their efforts through the night they would have easily arrived in time.

Antitank defenses appear to have been given scant consideration. The few antitank mines available were wasted. At the very least they could have been placed between buildings and covered with rubble so they could not be by-passed. Apparently no attempt was made to construct any type of tank obstacle, though there was sufficient time to erect hasty barricades.

While extenuating circumstances may excuse the lack of electrical  
(149) Personal opinion ; (150) A-35, p. 72.



communications from company to platoon, there can be no valid excuse for the failure to prepare plans governing the conduct of units in the event of a heavy German attack resulting in a breakthrough. Alternate positions were not prepared, no assembly areas or route of withdrawal had been designated. As their positions were overrun each platoon retreated in a different direction, none of them had any instructions to guide them so there was no purpose to their actions. It can be safely said that even the most general of instructions would have gone a long way toward preventing the panic and disorganization that occurred as the Germans entered Schmidt. A plan would have preserved a measure of control and order in spite of the very inadequate communications. In this case, the battalion and company command posts may as well have been in New York City for all the influence they exerted.

It is hard to understand why no use was made of the protective qualities of the buildings of Schmidt, especially in view of the fact that there were no antitank defenses. Had some of the defending units prepared positions in the houses, Schmidt could not have fallen as rapidly as it did. Perhaps the town could even have been held long enough for the American tanks to arrive. The belated efforts of the command groups of K and L Companies, and of the 3rd platoon of Company I to defend from buildings may well be compared to "locking the barn door after the horse has been stolen." (151)

THE DEFENSE OF HOFEN, GERMANY  
BY THE 3RD BATTALION, 395TH INFANTRY, 99TH DIVISION  
10 NOVEMBER - 18 DECEMBER 1944  
MAP C

On 10 November 1944, the 3rd Battalion, 395th Infantry, relieved elements of the 15th Armored Infantry of the defense of Hofen. The new battalion area consisted of a long narrow hill mass, about 6000 yards in  
(151) Personal opinion.

?  
see map

length, which dominated approaches from both the east and west. The slopes of this hill were very heavily wooded and, except for the roads, impassable to armor. Hofen was important to the Americans because of its dominating position overlooking lines of communication several miles to the rear; its loss would force the Americans several miles back. (152)

To reduce confusion and facilitate the physical relief, the battalion initially occupied the positions of the unit being relieved. Company I, with a section of heavy machine guns attached, took over the left of the battalion; Company K, with a platoon of heavy machine guns attached, took over the center of the line; while Company L, with a section of heavy machine guns attached, occupied the right of the line.

It was soon apparent that the battalion's dispositions were not tactically sound and could not be held under a sustained attack. The battalion front was held by a thin line of riflemen and automatic weapons with no reserves backing them up, the battalion mortars could not cover the front without shifting base plates, and communications between units was unsatisfactory. (153) Work was begun at once strengthening the defensive positions.

A series of mutually supporting strongpoints replaced the thin line of riflemen. The strongpoints consisted of a squad or a half squad of riflemen and an automatic weapon of some type. The riflemen were normally placed in position to the flanks and rear of the automatic weapon to provide all around protection for it. Alternate positions were prepared to the flanks and rear of each strongpoint to facilitate withdrawal to the flanks and/or rear. In almost all cases the machine guns were employed singly, even the .50 calibre machine guns were put in positions to bolster up the fire-power of the MLR.

Since the village was so narrow the MLR was, for the most part, in (152) A-33, p. 8; (153) A-<sup>33</sup>~~33~~, p. 9.

front of the town; however, on the left several of the strongpoints were emplaced in buildings on the forward edge. All along the front machine guns were emplaced in cellars of houses on the edge of town to provide supporting fires for troops on the MLR. Within the town itself a large number of buildings were prepared for defense, and gun emplacements were constructed in the streets but were not occupied. The general plan was that if the units on the front line were driven back they could carry on the fight in town. Alternate positions were not prepared to the rear of town since the terrain there permitted no defense. An emergency assembly area was selected in a covered position about a mile to the rear of town for use in the event the battalion was forced out of Hofen.

The battalion commander withdrew one platoon of Company L from the line to form the nucleus of the battalion reserve. In the event of an emergency all battalion and company administrative personnel were to be attached to this platoon, so actually the reserve numbered slightly over 100 men. Several counterattack plans were worked out to seal off penetrations at what appeared to be the most dangerous points. The battalion reserve force, including the administrative detachments, rehearsed each of these plans several times. (154)

Communications were improved by the addition of a large number of phones and radios. Eventually a network of fifty-two telephones connected every strongpoint, observation post, and command post in the battalion. Wire was also laid to tie the battalion in with units on its right and left. (155)

Though good approaches for enemy armor were limited, antitank defenses were not neglected. Antitank mines were laid over and adjacent to all the roads leading into the position, furthermore, trees were felled across the roads to further restrict armored movement. During the period of preparation (154) Recent statement of Major K. P. Fabianich; (155) A-33, p. 11.

Company A, 612th TD Battalion was attached to the battalion. The armament of this company included twelve towed three inch guns which were used to cover the roads leading into the position. These guns were employed by platoon, four to a road, with one pair placed behind the other to provide defense in depth. Most of the guns were placed inside of houses or barns, with the corners ripped out to allow traverse. These positions were then reinforced with sandbags and camouflaged with natural debris. (156)

Personnel obstacles were prepared all along the battalion front. Anti-personnel mines were laid in large numbers to cover all possible avenues of approach, and barbed wire was strung around the strongpoints on the MIR.

While the battalion was improving its defenses the 81mm mortar platoon was brought up to a strength of ten mortars, (157) and the 196th Field Artillery Battalion was placed in direct support. During this period patrolling was active on both sides, with American patrols penetrating as far in as Rohren. (158) German patrols found it tough going since the battalion policy was that every sentinel, except those in automatic weapons emplacements, would engage enemy patrols. (159)

At 2300 on 15 December, the outposts began reporting unusual noises and activity in the vicinity of Rohren. Friendly artillery and mortar fire soon brought a stop to this and all was quiet again.

At 0525 on 16 December, Hofen was rocked with German artillery, mortar, and rocket concentrations. For twenty minutes the barrages walked over the battalion causing tremendous destruction. The Battalion CP was badly damaged; many of the personnel on duty there were either killed or wounded, while almost all the wire lines were knocked out. (160)

At 0550 the Germans illuminated the entire front with artificial moonlight. Though the locations of the searchlights were quickly determined,

(156) Recent statement of Major K. P. Fabianich; (157) A-33, p. 10;

(158) A-33, p. 11; (159) A-33, p. 12; (160) A-33, p. 15.

they were allowed to remain in operation since the company commanders reported that visibility along the front had been considerably improved.

At approximately 0600 large numbers of German infantry could be observed moving up the slope toward the MTR. The bulk of the forces was directed at the boundary between I and K Companies and the left flank of Company I. Fire was withheld until the Germans were within 200 yards of the MTR, then every weapon opened fire almost simultaneously with devastating results. The Germans tried in vain to overrun the positions, but the system of mutually supporting strongpoints prevented them from isolating any small units. (161) At 0655 the Germans withdrew into the woods to the front of the battalion, leaving well over 100 dead plus some forty prisoners of war behind them.

At 1235, a German rifle company launched an attack against Company K. This attack was easily stopped by artillery and mortar concentrations and a little small arms fire. The remainder of the 16th and the 17th was spent in repairing damaged installations, clearing away the debris, and bringing up fresh supplies of rations and ammunition. (162)

At 0345 on 18 December, the Germans mounted an attack against Company I. In spite of heavy protective fires a small force of Germans succeeded in breaching the defenses and established themselves on the edge of the village. Company I successfully sealed off this force, and with the coming of dawn attacked and destroyed it.

The Germans had not given up, for at 0830 they began to rain artillery, mortar, and rocket barrages onto the defenders. About a half hour after the shelling commenced the German infantry, supported by twelve tanks and seven armored cars, struck at Companies I and K. (163) The German armor was never able to make its weight felt or to assault the defenses since the three inch guns forced them to keep under cover beyond a small ridge line to the front. (161) A-33, p. 16; (162) A-33, p. 17; (163) A-33, p. 18.

Along the Company K front the Germans made a penetration of about 100 yards. Previously planned mortar and artillery concentrations soon limited this attack and forced the enemy to flee to the rear. In the meantime the Germans made another small penetration in the Company I area from which they were also forced to withdraw by the weight of close-in defensive fires. As soon as the enemy infantry withdrew the German armor lost no time in pulling out.

No sooner had this attack terminated than another heavy attack was launched against Company I by an infantry battalion. After heavy fighting the enemy made a penetration 100 yards deep and 400 yards long. About 100 Germans occupied the four large houses in this area and began firing in all directions from the doors and windows. Again heavy artillery and mortar concentrations were brought down to destroy this force, however the protection afforded the Germans by the houses made the fire ineffective. The battalion commander then ringed the penetrated area in with artillery fire and ordered the battalion reserve into position to seal off any infiltration. (164) Two 57mm antitank guns were moved in and, under the cover of small arms fire of the battalion reserve, commenced firing AP ammunition into the German held houses. Within a few minutes the walls were riddled with holes, while blood-curdling screams could be heard from within testifying to the effectiveness of the fire.

The battalion reserve moved in for the attack under the cover of machine gun and antitank gun fire. With the aid of white phosphorous grenades the houses were quickly reduced. Twenty-five prisoners were taken, while in the battered houses were seventy-five bodies, literally shredded by the antitank gun fire. (165)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

This action illustrates the correct application of many of the techniques advocated in this study. There is little to criticize in the organization

(164) A-33, p. 19; (165) A-33, p. 20.

of the fire plan or antitank defenses. The most notable point, however, is the provision for an enemy breakthrough and the preparation of alternate positions in depth all the way through the village to enable a contest for every yard of ground.

Here is a typical example where the routes of approach for enemy armor were so canalized that, by properly covering the few available routes with obstacles and antitank guns, the armored threat was eliminated. Many commanders would have relied on the fairly good natural defenses and failed to provide heavy defenses on these routes. The tank defenses here accomplished their mission so readily that it is easy to ignore them. Though, had the battalion commander failed to properly consider the armored threat, this defensive operation could have been a failure.

The commander here made maximum use of the terrain available. By placing his main defenses forward of the village he compensated for its lack of depth, while using the built-up area to stiffen the defenses.

The provision of a reserve force must not be passed over lightly. True, all of the field manuals insist that a reserve be held out, yet a study of village defensive actions in World War II indicates that a reserve force was the exception rather than the rule. In this particular example the battalion that was relieved had no reserve. Even with a 6000 yard sector to hold, the commander under study was able to provide at least a small reserve, which he augmented with every possible man from the command and administrative echelons. There appears to be a tendency in the American Army to make excuses why a reserve should not be held out, the most common alibi in Europe was that the frontages were so great that it was impossible to constitute a reserve without weakening the MLR. This is all the more reason why a reserve must be maintained -- the weaker the defenses the stronger the reserve.

The commander might be criticized for his order to engage all enemy

patrols with fire. It is a common practice of attacking forces to locate strongpoints by sending in patrols to draw fire. (166)

THE DEFENSE OF BUTZDORF AND TETTINGEN, GERMANY  
BY THE 1ST BATTALION, 376TH INFANTRY, 94TH DIVISION  
14-18 JANUARY 1945  
MAP D

On the morning of 14 January 1945 the 1st Battalion, 376th Infantry, attacked and captured the neighboring towns of Butzdorf and Tettingen. This venture created a precarious salient over a mile long and 300 to 400 yards wide, which was dominated by a ring of enemy held ridges and hills. The most dangerous threat to the salient came from a high ridge directly to the east which was dotted with pillboxes looking right down the collective throats of the 1st Battalion. (167)

Immediately following the capture of these two towns a hasty defense was organized. Company A, with one platoon of heavy machine guns attached, was to be responsible for the defense of Butzdorf. (168) Company C, with one platoon of heavy machine guns attached, battalion headquarters, and five TD's occupied Tettingen. (169) Company B was initially split, with one platoon in Butzdorf and the remainder in Tettingen. On the 16th, Company B was withdrawn from these two towns, on regimental order, to fill a gap on the left between the 1st and 2nd Battalions. (170)

The 81mm mortar platoon had firing positions in the vicinity of Wochern since it was impossible to find suitable defiladed positions around Butzdorf or Tettingen. Subsequent action justified this decision, for as soon as any 60mm mortar attempted to fire it was knocked out by direct fire from the ridge to the east. (171) The battalion antitank platoon initially kept its positions in Wochern for much the same reasons. (172)

No sooner had the towns been occupied than work commenced to ready them for the expected German counterattacks. Activity was restricted by

(166) Personal opinion; (167) A-36, p. 65; (168) A-38, p. 65; (169) A-38, p. 4; (170) A-37, p. 119; (171) Recent statement of Lt. Col. R. A. Miner; (172) A-37, p. 94.



the intense and accurate fire which German positions on the surrounding hills threw at everything that moved. It was almost impossible to step out of doors and live. Firing positions within both villages were placed in houses; communications between positions was obtained by blasting holes in the walls of adjoining houses. Later this proved to be a valuable asset, enabling the defenders to shift from one building to another to meet fresh attacks or to escape the direct fire of German tanks, which were in the habit of pushing the muzzles of their guns inside of windows and letting go.

Communication between Butzdorf and Tettingen was almost entirely by radio. Wire was laid, but the incessant German fire made it impossible to keep in. Practically all wire repair had to be accomplished at night. Messenger service between the two towns was a risky business, even at night, since the Germans swept the area with small arms fire at all hours.

Artillery defensive fires had been planned in detail even before the battalion had attacked Tettingen and Butzdorf; however, new concentrations were planned and tied in with other protective fires. (173)

During the night of the 14th large quantities of ammunition were brought in and placed on position, and casualties were evacuated. (174) Small patrols were sent out, but since their radius of action was so limited they accomplished very little. (175)

Shortly before 0300 on the 15th, the Germans plastered both villages with artillery and mortar fire. At 0300, about 400 infantrymen swept down from a wooded hill to the northwest, yelling and screaming as they came. Final protective fires and barrages took a heavy toll but failed to halt the charge. Under the cover of positions on the heights, the enemy infantry succeeded in surrounding Butzdorf and in punching into Tettingen.

In Tettingen the fight ran hot and heavy as German infantrymen assaulted and grenaded houses systematically, supported by machine guns which

(173) Recent statement of Lt. Col. R. A. Miner; (174) A-38, p. 7;  
(175) Recent statement of Lt. Col. R. A. Miner.

had been set up within a few yards of the buildings. Small units fought back and forth through the town for over three hours. Concentration after concentration of artillery and mortar fire, (176) many of them within fifty yards of the American positions, (177) were brought down on the Germans to break up their attack. By dawn, the Germans had lost so many men that they were forced to break off the attack, (178) leaving some 300 casualties behind them. As an indication of the intensity of this action it might be noted that the mortar platoon expended over 2,600 rounds, while the heavy machine gun platoon in Tettingen expended 72,000 rounds. (179)

During the afternoon of the 15th the Germans launched two more attacks against Tettingen; neither were very serious. The first attack consisted of about a platoon of infantry, while the second attack included four tanks supported by a small number of infantry. (180)

The Germans made no overt action on the 16th and 17th, but contented themselves with continually shelling the two towns. By this time the strain was beginning to tell on the defenders; the bitter cold, the loss of sleep, and the never-ending shellings undermined the strength of even the strongest. In Butzdorf, things were particularly bad, since in addition to all the other hardships, Company A was practically cut off from the rest of the battalion. (181)

On the 16th, the Division G-2 issued a warning that tactical air reconnaissance had picked up signs of enemy armor moving in the general direction of Butzdorf. That same day tracked vehicles were heard moving beyond the regimental front. The 1st Battalion immediately turned its attention to the antitank defenses. Antitank mines were laid on all roads leading into Butzdorf, and along the eastern side of Tettingen. Additional bazooka teams were formed, while extra stocks of bazooka ammunition were placed on all positions. At 0300 on the morning of the 18th, a patrol from (176) A-36, p. 66; (177) A-38, p. 7; (178) A-36, p. 66; (179) A-38, p. 7; (180) A-37, p. 117; (181) A-36, p. 69.

Company A captured two members of the 11th Panzer Division. (182) With this news the antitank platoon was ordered to displace forward at dawn from Wochen to positions around Tettingen. (183)

At 0715 heavy preparatory fires crashed on the already battered towns. At 0740 the shelling ceased as armor and infantry moved in from the north and east. The German forces included an armored engineer company, a panzer grenadier battalion, a tank company, and four self-propelled guns. In spite of the heavy protective fires, the German forces reached Butzdorf and Tettingen almost simultaneously. (184)

In Butzdorf, the mines at the northern entrance into town proved their value; an assault gun moving into town lost a track here, delaying two half-tracks long enough for them to be knocked out by bazooka fire. (185) The Germans gradually forced their way into town with their tanks blasting at every building that still stood. Tank-hunter teams trapped several tanks that were moving through the streets alone, and after buttoning them up with small arms fire destroyed them with bazooka fire or satchel charges. (186)

The attack was also making headway in Tettingen. The initial assault caught the 57mm antitank guns going into position, however one gun managed to knock out one tank before it in turn was knocked out. The Germans soon captured the halfway house and several other buildings on the northeast side of town. Individual riflemen and machine gunners infiltrated all through the town, sniping at everyone that showed his head. Tanks were in the streets firing at close range into every building suspected of harboring defenders. As in Butzdorf, bazooka teams stopped more than their share of tanks, firing at ranges as short as five yards. (187) At one time during this attack as many as thirty-five tanks were counted within the two towns. (188)

(182) A-37, p. 120; (183) A-36, p. 69; (184) A-37, p. 121; (185) A-37, p. 123; (186) A-37, p. 124; (187) A-37, p. 123; (188) A-37, p. 511.

The German infantry had their fill of fighting by 0900 and commenced withdrawing, taking the armor with them. As soon as the attack had ceased, Company A and Company C made local counterattacks to recover the houses that the Germans still held. (189) While these attacks were generally successful it was not until that evening that all the snipers were finally cleared from Tettingen. (190)

The Germans launched a small attack at about 1045 which was easily turned back by the seven battalions of artillery now firing in support of the 1st Battalion. (191)

The Germans made another try at 1130, when nine or ten tanks waddled in toward the 1st Battalion area. Four tanks went into hull defilade on the ridge to the east of Tettingen, while the others moved into firing positions north of Butzdorf. From these positions the tanks methodically raked the defenses with armor-piercing and high explosive shells. The defenders took to the cellars for protection, leaving lookouts to observe for any signs of an attack. The tank destroyers in Tettingen tried to return the fires but failed to achieve any visible results, mainly because of the unfavorable slope. The artillery also failed to bring any relief to the battalion. (192)

The tanks continued firing without let-up until 1430, when three battalions of infantry supported by fifteen tanks attacked Butzdorf. There was no halting this attack, within a very few minutes the enemy tanks were cruising through Butzdorf. (193) Elements of the 2nd Battalion, 375th Infantry, which had arrived in Tettingen to relieve the 1st Battalion found it impossible to get into Butzdorf to render any assistance. (194) By 1700, the situation was hopeless. Though Company A still held a few buildings in the southern part of town it was out of Bazooka ammunition and satchel charges, and tanks were tearing into what was left of the defenses.

(189) A-37, p. 125; (190) A-37, p. 129; (191) A-38, p. 7; (192) A-38, p. 11; (193) A-37, p. 128; (194) Recent statement of Lt. Col. R. A. Miner.

Shortly after dark, Company A withdrew from Butzdorf under the cover of a wall of artillery fire. (195)

In the course of this action the 1st Battalion had killed 850 Germans, captured another 150, and destroyed eight tanks and eleven half-tracks. (196)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

This action illustrates the consequences of defending a village without securing adjoining dominating terrain. Equally well illustrated is the inherent defensive strength of built-up areas, as was so well demonstrated here by the effective resistance that was offered after staggering punishment.

While the battalion itself cannot be criticized for the attack and occupation of Butzdorf and Tettingen, the headquarters that initiated the attack order should have considered the fate of any force ordered to defend such a salient. It was well known that the ground adjacent to these two towns was strongly held, yet no effort was made to secure the overwatching ridges.

Though the incessant shelling and tank fire virtually leveled both villages, the casualties among the defenders were surprisingly light, proving that the use of buildings as firing positions is sound. Had this battalion prepared positions outside of the villages it is almost certain that it could never have withstood the masses of tanks that were hurled at Butzdorf and Tettingen.

Again it was shown that the chief threat to a defense within a village is the tank, not infantry. Protective fires and barrages can normally stop or pulverize an infantry attack enough to make it ineffective, but tanks are not easily stopped by artillery or small arms fire. In this action it was not the German infantry that forced Company A out of Butzdorf, (195) A-37, p. 129; (196) A-37, p. 511.

but the tanks.

That infantry is not completely helpless against armored attack was proven by the courageous work of the bazooka teams. Tank-hunters are an essential part of every determined defense, for it is almost impossible to prevent every enemy tank from getting into the position.

The battalion was tardy in preparing its antitank defenses. These should have been laid out as soon as possible. In this case warning was received early enough to provide all protection possible, but such will not always be the case.

Throughout the entire action several tank-destroyers were located in Tettingen, though none were in Butzdorf. It would appear that these weapons might have been employed to much better advantage in Butzdorf where there was greater danger from German tanks.

#### CONCLUSIONS

In retrospect, it may be said that small towns and villages are areas of great defensive value, and often occupy critical points which may be of tactical or strategical value. Villages offer many distinct advantages to the defender, the principal advantage being the protection they provide against armor when properly utilized. Most buildings provide an amazing degree of protection against tank, artillery, and small arms fires. The contrasting defenses at Schmidt and Butzdorf offer sufficient proof of this.

It can be readily seen from this study and the small unit actions used as illustrations, that the defense of a village is organized and conducted as for any other position. However, certain aspects of the defense of a built-up area merit special attention.

When a village is defended it must be incorporated into the overall defenses and any nearby terrain dominating it must be secured. Failure to do this will allow the enemy either to by-pass the position or make it untenable by occupying the commanding ground. It can be stated as a rule

that the enemy will not make a frontal attack of a built-up area if he can avoid it -- one aim of the defense is to make it impossible for him to avoid it. The failure to secure the ridges around Butzdorf made life for the defenders a living hell, and seriously handicapped the defense at every turn.

Perhaps the most important consideration in the defense of a town is that of control. Once contact with the enemy has been made, control of the defending units becomes very difficult. Observation is impossible, communications are unreliable, and combat action invariably breaks down to a number of somewhat unrelated small unit actions. The surest way to maintain control is the preparation and dissemination of detailed plans to provide for every contingency. A comprehensive plan will permit all units to act in accord, even in the absence of communications, and will be a steadying influence at the more critical moments; for panic usually starts when men become frightened and have no plan or instructions to guide them. The collapse at Schmidt may be largely attributed to the failure of the commander to issue a plan governing the conduct of his units in the event the Germans overran some of the positions. On the other hand, the organization of the defenses at Hofen and Boos are excellent examples of the type of planning recommended.

Reserves are an important element in any defense, but particularly so in this type of action where it is necessary to prevent the enemy from establishing himself within the position. Commanders must insure that adequate reserves are withheld in spite of what may appear to be extenuating circumstances. Weakness is not an excuse for failure to constitute a reserve element, but a reason why a reserve must be organized. Reserves must be so located and rehearsed that a counterattack may be launched without needless delay. The examples at Boos and Hofen indicate that sound commanders provide for reserves regardless of the strength of their forces or the tactical situation.

The most important of the physical aspects of the defense are the anti-tank measures that are employed. It is paradoxical that villages and towns

are the strongest areas for antitank defense, yet the tank is the most effective weapon that can be employed against them. It has been repeatedly emphasized throughout this study that the organization of the antitank defenses must have first priority if it is within the enemy's capabilities to employ armor. Antitank defenses are effective only when they are organized in depth, from well beyond the perimeter to the heart of the town. Tanks must not be allowed to systematically destroy the village defenses at long range -- which they did at Butzdorf; or allowed to roam unchecked through the position -- which they did at Schmidt. The action at Schmidt all too well illustrates the fate of a unit that completely neglected its antitank defenses.

Obstacles are an integral part of antitank defenses that are frequently neglected or slighted. The Germans and Russians made extensive use of elaborate obstacles when organizing their defenses in and about villages, yet few examples can be found of the construction of obstacles, worthy of the name, by American units. Antitank fires alone only provide a half-way defensive system, such fires are much more effective when tied in and coordinated with obstacles. The organization of Boos was, in a small way, an example of the type of antitank plan desired; though there were not nearly enough obstacles, particularly outside of town, for the conduct of a protracted defense.

Summarizing, the salient points of the defense of a village or a small town are:

1. A FLEXIBLE AND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN GOVERNING THE CONDUCT OF ALL SUBORDINATE UNITS.
2. ANTITANK DEFENSES IN DEPTH IN WHICH ANTITANK FIRES AND OBSTACLES ARE CAREFULLY COORDINATED.
3. RESERVES PREPARED FOR SPEEDY COUNTERATTACK.
4. APPLICATION OF ACCEPTED PRINCIPLES OF DEFENSE. (197)

(197) Personal opinion.